

Shaped by Thirst , Lent 3, March 12, 2023

What did you and I do this morning, to quench our physical thirst for water? What did you and I do, to quench our spiritual thirst for living water? The bible mentions thirst many times – both physical and spiritual. One of my favourite scriptures, Ps 63.1, speaks of spiritual thirst.

Oh God, you are my God, and I seek you.

My soul thirsts for you,

My flesh faints for you

As in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

As water quenches our physical thirst and refreshes our body, so, living water refreshes our soul, sustaining our spiritual life. As Barb & Zac mentioned, we are looking at being shaped by our thirst this morning. Visually, thirst is represented by the blue cloth on the cross and the blue border around the picture on our bulletin cover.

During Experiencing the Story, we first heard how the Children of Israel grumbled and complained, when they were physically thirsty in the wilderness. They were shaped by this experience, of God once again, miraculously meeting their needs.

In the second story Jesus offered “living” water, to meet a woman’s spiritual thirst. I invite you to imagine along with me, what it would have been like to be that Samaritan woman, meeting Jesus at Jacob’s well. How did their interaction change or shape her? I will share some of the thoughts, that I & others, have imagined. (put on shawl)

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Good Morning, my name is Linda, and I am a Samaritan woman. Samaria is located between Galilee to the North and Judea to the south. Long ago, when Samaria was captured by the Assyrians, the Assyrian king deported many Jews, and repopulated our nation with conquered peoples from distant lands. Over a 700 yr. period of time, intermarriage with these foreigners made us what the “true” Jews called a “half-breed.” They looked down on us because we weren’t “pure.” They didn’t want anything to do with us.

On the day I met Jesus, I had had a very frustrating morning. I had made the long trek to the well, like every morning, to fill my water jug. But late morning, it got knocked over and I lost every drop of water! That meant going back to the well in the middle of the day. And believe me, no one wants to do that in the blazing sun.

But I was so thirsty! I needed water for cooking and cleaning, in addition to drinking. I felt like I didn’t have any choice so back to the well I trudged. When I finally got close, I noticed a man sitting by the well. I saw from his dress and features that he was a Jew. I wondered what he was doing there, and then I didn’t know what to do.

Jews when travelling between Judea and Galilee, would usually walk miles out of their way to avoid us Samaritans. I really didn’t want to deal with the disapproval I expected to see on his face. I thought of turning back - but I was so thirsty, I needed water! I finally decided to just ignore him, pretend he wasn’t there and get my water.

To my surprise, as I was filling my water jar, he asked me for a drink. Shocked I said: "You, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Besides the fact that I was a Samaritan, everyone knew that men did not speak with women in public! He looked so tired and thirsty though, that I decided to give him a drink. I filled the cup that sat by the well and handed it to him.

He took the cup from my hands, drank thirstily, then returned it to me, smiling and said the strangest things. He said: "If I could catch a glimpse of the gift God wanted to give me, if I could see for a moment who was asking me for a drink, then I would have asked him for a drink and he would have given me "living" water.

Well, I didn't know what kind of gift God wanted to give me, I thought I could see who was asking me for a drink, and I didn't have a clue what he meant by "living" water. I asked where he would get this "living" water, as he didn't even have a bucket, and the well was deep, built by our ancestor Jacob. Did he think he was greater than Jacob?

Again, he had a strange reply. Pointing to the well he said: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But those who drink of the water that I will give them, will never be thirsty.

Now that caught my attention! Imagine! Having an inner water supply so I would never get thirsty again. Somehow his words flooded me with hope. Oh, how I wanted, ... the kind of water that would quench my deepest thirst. "Give me that water," I begged. "Please, please sir. I'm so tired of coming here, of getting thirsty all the time, of never being deeply satisfied. Please."

He listened, and then he looked intently into my face. I felt that he was seeing right through me - into my very soul. I sensed that my life was an open book to him. Like he knew all about my difficult living situation, all my successes and all my failures. Strangely, that didn't bother me. I somehow felt accepted and safe. "Go," he said, "and call your husband and come back."

My hope for "living" water disappeared instantly. Over-whelming sadness and grief welled up inside me. I said: "I don't have a husband."

'I guess that's true,' he said, and I looked at him. He continued. "You have had five husbands, and the man you are now with ... is not your husband."

I was shocked, both by what he said, and by the look on his face. It was full of compassion. There was no condemnation or judgement, just sorrow. How could this Jewish man, a stranger here, how could he know my life situation, unless he was a prophet.

You must be a prophet," I said. And then all I could think of was the question I'd always wanted to ask a prophet. I had overheard, in countless religious discussions, the age-old Jewish/Samaritan question about worship: should we worship in Jerusalem, like the Jews insisted, or Mount Gerezim where we Samaritans worshipped? Who was right, my religious leaders or the Jews?

He looked searchingly at me before he spoke, and his answer cut through those endless theological quarrels. "The time is coming...in fact," he said, "it is here now, and those who seek God, who worship God, will worship in spirit and truth. Those are the worshipers God wants. God remember, is Spirit and real worship is in spirit and truth."

What did he mean? Was he saying that where we worship, and maybe how we outwardly worship, isn't as important as what's in our hearts and minds? And what did he mean by talking about what was coming and is here now? His words were so confusing - enough to make me dizzy.

Then I thought, oh, maybe he is talking about the coming of the Messiah. So, I said, "I know the Messiah is coming, and when the Messiah comes, He will explain everything to us."

He was silent for a moment and then responded, "I who speak to you, I am he." I couldn't believe it! I was meeting the Messiah! Me talking to the Messiah but it was more than that the Messiah was talking to me!

But what kind of messiah was this? He knew I was a Samaritan, a woman, and yet he was speaking to me like an equal, offering me "living" water, as an answer to my deepest longings. I looked into his face and felt God's love and acceptance gushing up within me. He was the answer to my deepest longings. He was "living" water!

Then, I heard voices. I heard a couple of whispers: "What will he do next, talking to a Samaritan woman?" "What's she doing out here this time of day?" I looked up to see Jesus silencing them with a stare. He looked back at me and smiled.

I felt I was going to burst with excitement. I couldn't keep this good news to myself. I knew that if He were the answer to my deepest longings, he was also the answer to every one else's, too. I ran to the village as fast as I could. "Listen," I said. "I have just met the most amazing Jewish man out at the well. He talked to me and told me everything I've ever done. I think this is the Messiah! What do you think? Come and meet him."

People said to me afterwards that the change in my face, my voice, my eyes - it was so compelling that they too believed he was the Messiah. They returned to the well with me. When we got to the well, Jesus nodded and smiled at me as if we were old friends. I introduced him to my neighbours, and they invited him to come to our village. And he agreed to come and stayed two days! Imagine! A Jewish man staying in our Samaritan village. Mind-boggling!

He showed us that God's love is available to everyone. My life and the lives of many others were changed forever that day. (Remove scarf)

As I read and reread this scripture, I tried to listen for invitations from the Spirit. I chose five to share and some of my questions related to them.

The first invitation is in relation to Prejudice: Who are the people that you and I feel superior to - possibly because of religion, culture, gender, race, education, health including addictions, wealth, politics, or lifestyle? How might the Spirit be inviting us to change our attitudes?

The 2nd invitation is in relation to Marginalized People. Who are the people in our society that are marginalized, who are made to feel like they don't belong? How is the Spirit inviting us individually and collectively to work for change?

The 3rd invitation is in relation to Worship: Are we worshipping in spirit and truth? E.g. Are we really seeking God or just going through the motions? Are we searching for the truth about ourselves and God? These words from the song *Come and See*, come to mind:

Come and see, come and see, I am the way and the truth said he.

Follow me, follow me, come as a child, and come and see.

How might the Spirit be inviting us to change our understandings and practices of worship?

The 4th invitation is in relation to Living Water: In John 4.14, Jesus says: "But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty." How and when do you and I choose to drink of the living water? Might our spiritual practices, in addition to Sunday worship, help us drink of the "living" water, so that it can bubble up in us and through us? How might the Spirit be inviting us to change?

The 5th invitation is in relation to Sharing the Good News: Who are the people in our spheres of influence - be they friends, family, neighbours, or strangers - with whom the Spirit is inviting us to share our experiences with "living" water? What keeps us from sharing? How might the Spirit be inviting us to change?

My prayer is that each of us may be shaped and changed, by our continually choosing to drink from the living water that quenches our deepest thirst so that we can say:

There's a river of life flowing out through me.
It makes the lame to walk and the blind to see.
It opens prison doors, sets the captives free.
There's a river of life flowing out through me.